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Negating the Negation: The Practice of Parkour in Spectacular City

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This paper interrogates the role of architecture in (re)producing and mediating the spectacular city. I use Debord's theorizations on the society of the spectacle to forefront the commodification of urban architectural space. Finally, I argue that the art of parkour, as a spectacular performance, answers Debord's call for an analysis of the spectacle within its own language. Parkour, I suggest, offers a reinterpretation of the city's architectural space by falsifying the false reality of the spectacle and challenging its domination.

Introduction

The right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire. We need to be sure we can live with our own creations (a problem for every planner, architect, and utopian thinker). But the right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights (David Harvey, *The Right to the City* 237).

9:45 a.m., Monday, October, 2001, 14th street, Atlanta, GA.

I hailed a cab in the heart of downtown Atlanta to make a job interview for a marketing position at the Concourse at Landmark Center in Sandy Springs, GA. The two large buildings at the Concourse at Landmark Center are otherwise known as the king and queen towers for their large white lattices resembling, respectively, the crowns of a king and queen. Once inside the cab, the driver asked me where I was going. I told him that I was going to "the king and queen towers, please." To which he responded, "ah, you must be really important." That morning my body was decorated with a business suit and a briefcase that were meant to display some sort of "importance" and my conforming to a particular spatial practice. However, in my ego-blinded naiveté I responded jokingly, "not yet." The driver argued back "come on, people that work there are the important people." I then told him that I did not work at the king and queen towers but that I was only going for an interview. The driver then responded, "you know you've made it if you can get a job in a place like that. Let's hope that after today you will be one of the important people."

This opening example helps to illustrate how an individual's use-value can be interpreted based not only on his or her labor but also in the spatial location of that labor. The practice of parkour, too, is reliant on spatial location for much of its efficacy and legibility. The practice of parkour, in fact its ability to displace the body and offer new urban sensibilities, requires the physical presence of a city's built form. Parkour attempts not to break urban social space apart at its seams, but to offer its practitioner a more emancipated envisioning of what it means to exist within urban space and connect to its flow. The parkour practitioner's body in its spatial location is also engaged with both the physical presence of architecture and the embedded codified representations of power. While it is impossible to generalize as to a sensibility surrounding the king and queen towers, these buildings communicate, or at least attempt to communicate, a particular message for the businesses operating there of their power and place within the capitalistic project. The representation of the location of my potential labor, and seeming access to its power flows, also came with an appearance of prestige and an increased ability to consume commodities which in turn ostensibly afforded a higher social capital. Demonstrated here is one way that capital flows, architecture, the body, and spatial location all combine and present themselves as normative and disciplinary forces to urban lived experience.

Guy Debord's theorization of the spectacle demonstrates that this might not be pure speculation. Capital's grip on urban space, a fetishized abstraction from human activity, directly influences how individuals read each other as well as appropriate ways of being. Upon social life being dominated by the economy, Debord argues that this domination brought about a "degradation of being into *having*" (10). What Debord points out is that within the capitalistic society individuals are no longer equated with what they are but with what they have – or perhaps more importantly with what they appear to have. The power of this appearance, however, still has a material dependency.

Specifically, here, and central to my argument, is the way in which architectural space provides much of the materiality for the appearance and representation upon which the spectacle relies. The spectacle is itself an abstraction from embodied practice that has reached the level of fetishism as social relations become relations between commodities. The spectacle has gained its domination through appearance and commodities as they act as the media through which we understand our relation to the world, our relation to others, and ourselves. Architectural space has always been central to the process of this legibility as a mediating form of social life. Architecture and the urban built environment must be included in discussions centered on the spectacle's power within appearance and representation in capitalist society. Debord sees the power of the material city as he argues that urbanism and city planning are "capitalism's method for taking over the natural and human environment" (95). In order for this project of total domination to be

constituted as logical, “capitalism now can and must refashion the totality of space into *its own particular décor*” (Debord 95). Architectural space as commodified space provides a necessary material framework (or capitalism’s décor) that presents itself as normal and banal, for such space is produced, absorbed, and aligned within the spectacle. Architecture, then, can participate in the spectacle’s isolation and falsification. Architecture’s participation in this falsification is found in its functioning, in part, to (re)produce the material foundation of the society of the spectacle.

Debord argues that “universal history was born in cities” (97). He believes that the history of the city is one of both “freedom and tyranny” for that history is one of state administrative control as the city is the locus of social power (Debord 97). Debord also argues that the proliferation of the urban environment is “directly governed by the imperative of consumption” (97). I refer to this urban environment governed by the imperative of consumption as spectacular city.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to interrogate the role of architecture in (re)producing and mediating the spectacular city and the forms of social life informed and dominated by the spectacle. Further, I use Debord’s theorizations on the society of the spectacle to forefront the spectacle’s representation within and commodification of urban architectural space. I argue alongside Debord that the city is a spectacle and presents itself as such. Finally, I argue that the art of parkour, as an art form centered on the reclamation of personal freedom, answers Debord’s call for an analysis of the spectacle within its own language. Parkour, I suggest, functions to reinscribe the “pre-eminence once occupied by touch” by falsifying the false reality of the spectacle, through spectacle, at once bringing to the fore and negating its unconscious domination.

Parkour

As defined by its originator, David Belle, parkour functions as an art to help you pass any obstacle. The practice of parkour, and even its later coopted version free running, consists of a mode of bodily movement interacting with the architectural space of the urban environment. The word parkour was derived from the French words “parcours” (a line, course, circuit, road, way or route) and the verb “parcourir” (to travel through, to run over or through, to traverse) (Woody 1). Traceurs, the practitioners of parkour, describe their art form as a discipline for it is not only a practice but also a way of life. Parkour emerged from the physical training research done by Georges Hebert that was driven by the maxim, “to be useful you must be strong” (Woody 1). Jaclyn Law traces the roots of parkour in her article “PK and Fly.” Law explains that in the 1980s parkour pioneers David Belle and Sebastian Foucan named their art “parkour” after *parcours du combatant*, the obstacle courses of the French military” during Vietnam (Law).

In the practice of parkour, a young man is called a *traceur*; a woman is a *traceuse* (Wilkinson). The word *traceur* means “bullet.” It was chosen by Belle and Foucan to place emphasis on the fast execution of direct and efficient movement through any terrain (Wilkinson). Traceurs combine running, jumping, and climbing to explore both the potential of the body and the physical obstacles presented in the urban environment. Also known as “the art of displacement” parkour is centered on the use of the body to move freely and quickly through urban terrain unhindered by any structure. This ostensibly free movement is guided by an emancipatory philosophy.

As Belle describes in a 2007 interview with Alec Wilkinson of *The New Yorker*, parkour is about overcoming real and imagined obstacles that fetter lived experience. Belle states,

You always have to get through the first obstacle that says, ‘I can’t do it,’ whether in your mind or for real, and be able to adapt to anything that’s put in your path. It’s a method for learning how to move in the world. For finding the liberty men used to have. (Wilkinson)

At its core, this discipline is a practice of freedom, a way of liberating the practitioner from the confines, both material and abstract, that are found and engendered in urban architectural space.

The traceur shares some characteristics with Baudelaire’s flaneur. Both use the movement of the body to critique, explore, and understand the urban environment. Each is bound within capital. The flaneur strolls along at a pace afforded by his wealth. The traceur seeks free-flowing movement around obstacles set-up by capital attaining the speed afforded by an efficient, creative, and unhindered path. In many ways the flaneur engages the city through total immersion by strolling along the streets taking on different personas and vantage points. As Benjamin explains, the flaneur is a “scout in the marketplace” and as such is also an “explorer of the crowd” (21). The flaneur strolls through the city imposing himself onto the crowd and the landscape as an intellectual observer. The traceur, feeling already immersed, works to find the most efficient path through the landscape in a way that not only resists the fetters of quotidian life but that also points out the arbitrary ways that power is represented and organized.

While sharing many characteristics, the two practices are essentially separated by purpose. The flaneur sets out to observe the life of city dwellers using the crowd as a “veil” to transform the city into what Benjamin calls “phantasmagoria” (21). The flaneur wishes to be part of the crowd to experience all that the city has to offer the common city dweller. Conversely, the traceur wishes, not to be further consumed by the phantasmagoria but to find a balance within its ebb and flow a path of discovery offering a personal experience of unfettered life.

Much of the parkour’s founding philosophy parallels that of the martial arts regarding its devotion and commitment as a lifestyle. In fact, many

traceurs consider parkour not only as a lifestyle but as a way of thinking, a frame through which to view the world. Like some the martial arts, practitioners of parkour do not want it to be seen as a sport but rather as a discipline or art form (Woody 2). Parkour is meant to be a means of self-discovery and of self-improvement. The underlying philosophy has looked to eastern religion for its roots. At times compared to a Buddhist mindset, parkour emphasizes not competition, but the discipline of the individual. This art form values the personal journey of the individual and of its becoming. This philosophy and search for perfect fluidity emerged from David Belle's and Sebastian Foucan's developing their art in order to navigate Lisses, France (Woody 2). Lisses, as with most urban spaces, was constituted through both real and imagined boundaries constructed to restrict movement. The two founders pushed this notion further, as they felt that such restrictions to the movement of the body also lead to a suppression of thinking and ways of being. Thus, parkour was born.

Parkour functions as a way of understanding and locating the self within the urban terrain in opposition to capital and as a means through which individuals can call into question normative spatial existence within spectacular city. As such, parkour offers valuable insight into the material and abstract forms of the spectacle. David Thompson argues in the article, "Jump City: Parkour and the Traces," that parkour, "is an instance of the unruly intersection between capital flow and the flow of human bodies; instead of coinciding, they may intersect at angles of varying and appositional intensities" (251). Similarly, parkour negotiates spectacular city in the same vein of Debord's *détournement* as a cause centered on nothing but its own truth as present critique. Further, parkour provides us a new form of criticism with which to problematize the hypnotic and totalizing domination of the spectacular city.

Society of the Spectacle

Debord wrote his *Society of the Spectacle* as the theoretical ground on which stood the artistic and political movement founded by Debord and others in 1957 known as the Situationist International (SI). The SI sought to confront changing forms of social life in the urban environment. Debord and the members of the SI saw contemporary cities as centers of possibility for the transformation of everyday life. Believing life to be a series of situations, the SI challenged, through the creation of situation-specific playful interventions, the ambivalent and largely uncritical attitudes of individuals engaged in urban life. For the situationists the city was a site of possible emancipation, fulfillment, and play where individuals could challenge their oppression through the reappropriation of space to better suit their own needs and desires – a call for a more unitary urbanism. However, the SI understood that urban spaces were controlled under their current conditions by socio-

political forces whose suppression of urban social life was dependent upon inhabitants' domination and alienation. For Debord, the domination and alienation that misdirected any sense or attempt of emancipatory practice was the result of social life mediated through commodity relations. Debord posited that the extension of commodity relations had found its way into all aspects of lived experience: the practice of everyday life and culture. This relation, according to Debord, accelerated by emerging technologies and the flow of information and communication, demanded the development of a new way of looking at and of understanding society. The spectacle provided such a lens. According to Sadie Plant, author of *The Most Radical Gesture*, the spectacle "captured the contemplative and passive nature of modern life and accounted for the boredom and apathetic dissatisfaction which characterized social experience" (9).

This boredom and apathetic dissatisfaction, for Debord, was the result of the alienation of labor. Debord's notion of the alienation of labor stems from Marxist theories as well as from the writings of George Lukacs on the commodity fetish. Essentially, the worker has nothing to sell but his or her own labor. The alienation comes from the worker producing objects (or parts of objects) for the bourgeoisies (or the owners of the means of production) to sell as commodities. Therefore, as we see in Lukacs' notion of reification, the worker becomes known socially through and by his or her labor (Lukacs, *Class Consciousness*). According to Plant, the commodity fetish is a phenomenon "in which relations between people assume the form of relations between things" (11). Through their own labor, the workers produce and reproduce alienated social relations between things, and between each other. People, then, are located in society by the images of what they produce and what they own. For Plant, "labor is turned against the worker and appears as an autonomous power" and because this is normalized as a totality, it is "presented as a natural order, [and] the worker loses all reason to challenge or understand the experience of alienation" (11).

Anthropologist Gunther Kress in his book, *Communication and Culture: An Introduction*, provides a sort of materialist metaphor for the ways in which cultural artifacts become the forms through which we understand our world. Kress retells his childhood story of working in his grandmother's garden: an allotment at the edge of her small town. He notes that, "nature provided the ground (literally) on which culture could work" (5). Culture dictated the location and size of the allotment as well as the appropriate seeds to be planted. However, nature provided the limits to what was producible.

Culture, Kress argues, "is the result and effect of human action on nature" (6). It is within this action that culture sets its own rules and makes meaning. In order to act on nature human beings must produce objects that allow them to work on nature. In Kress' metaphor, these objects take the form of forks, rakes, and spades. These objects become cultural artifacts that have meaning as a set of signs and symbols. This system "tells us about the

relation of human beings to nature, about their relation to each other in social organization” (Kress 7). These objects become the way we understand how to engage the world as they are turned back on nature. For example, Kress explains the spade as a cultural artifact through which we now see nature; not as it is, but as easy to dig or healthy for planting. Nature “recedes and is replaced by a set of culturally determined labels that come to guide, shape, perhaps determine our thinking” (Kress 7).

Kress’ metaphor of the garden provides a useful parallel to the spectacle. As human beings act on nature they produce things that then become cultural artifacts. In Debord’s account these artifacts take the form of commodities. The commodity takes on a cultural meaning and becomes the way we see the world. As people are alienated from their labor the commodity becomes fetishized and is turned back on culture. Not only does that commodity become the way we see the world, but, according to Debord, it dominates our consciousness. As the spectacle is produced through labor and the commodity is fetishized, the spectacle becomes the abstraction through which our world is made legible.

Here we see the spectacle gain momentum, as the unification of the modern capitalist society is achieved through a commodity relation between people mediated by the objects they produce. The alienation of labor and fetishization of commodities constitutes a working class ripe for passive acceptance of subordination to the spectacle, for this separation, reflected in the spectacle, “is inseparable from the modern *state*” (Debord 13). It is the “product of the social division of labour that is both the chief instrument of class rule and the concentrated expression of all social divisions” (Debord 13). However, for the spectacle to at once unify and separate social life it is dependant upon society itself as a unifying force. Debord argues that the spectacle “presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a *means of unification*” (7). As society acts as a focal point of vision and of consciousness the spectacle inscribes itself into this vision and consciousness, relegating what was once real to the domain of delusion and false consciousness. The spectacle, then, is not a thing in itself. It is society as it is the very means of social relation; it represents the dominant model of life. Yet this unification achieved by the spectacle, for Debord, is nothing more than an official language of universal separation.

For Debord life in such modern conditions of separation is “presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (Debord 7). Further, and perhaps more importantly, the social relation becomes mediated by the image of these relations. Debord supports Marx’s argument, yet extends his critique, to argue that society’s alienation could be accounted for by the ubiquitous and ostensibly banal images and signs that conspired to confuse appearance and reality, throwing into question the “possibility of distinguishing true experience, authentic desire, and real life from their fabricated, manipulated,

and represented manifestations” (Plant 10). Yet, Debord is quick to point out that the spectacle is not merely a collection of images. Rather, “it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (Debord 7). For Debord, feelings of boredom, alienation, and the feelings of powerlessness of contemporary life could be directly attributed to the consequences of capitalist social relations and modes of production.

Debord seeks to forefront the illusory and disciplining spectacle engendered and powered by capitalistic social relations that has plagued modern capitalist society. He points out that the modern capitalist society has been characterized as an organization of spectacles. Plant argues, through Debord, that this organization results in “a frozen moment of history in which it is impossible to experience real life or actively participate in the construction of the lived world” (3). As individuals are alienated from their labor by the capitalistic modes of production, so too are they removed from their own experiences, emotions, creativity, and authentic desire. The result of this finds individuals participating in their own lives merely as spectators where “even the most personal gestures are experienced at one remove” (Plant 3).

The spectacle, however, has real and material origins and consequences. Debord warns that the spectacle cannot be thought of as an abstraction or in contrast to concrete social activity. It is a “worldview that has actually been materialized, a view of the world that has become objective” (Debord 7). Real life, for Debord, is then “materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it” (8). Essentially what Debord is inviting society to wrestle with is that the spectacle has been created and perpetuated by human labor. Debord points out that, “though separated from what they produce, people nevertheless produce every detail of their world with increasing power” (17). Although individuals are separated from their labor, it is from that very labor and commodities produced that the spectacle has emerged. The spectacle is able to continually reproduce itself through capitalism’s never-ending need to consume commodities. Debord notes that the “abstractifying of all individual labour and the general abstractness of what is produced are perfectly reflected in the spectacle, whose *manner of being concrete* is precisely *abstraction*” (15). Put succinctly by Debord, “the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point that it becomes images” (17). These images, having been inscribed into social consciousness, afford the spectacle a spatial modality that in turn becomes the dominant model for appropriate spatial practices within and understandings of spectacular city.

The power of the spectacle within spectacular city is found both in and through its being normalized within the modern capitalist way of life as a totality or natural phenomenon. The spectacle promises to fulfill every desire and every dream, in effect promising what religion could not, through and as the consumption of commodities. The spectacle usurps rationality as the guarantor of authentic experience, for it demands its recognition in urban

design and thought. Further, as Plant notes, “every moment of life must be mediated by the commodity form, a situation which makes it impossible to provide anything for oneself or act without the mediation of commodities” (10). This simply perpetuates the economic system in which commodities are produced and workers alienated. The consequence of this condition is a tautological world wherein the appearance of real life is maintained to facilitate a reality concealed by its absence. Debord’s call to reclaim a more authentic lived experience through the political struggle for emancipation is one that centers on the notion that to change everyday life it is necessary to change the space in which that life is practiced.

Spectacular City

Starchitect (or famous architect), Philip Johnson, in his 1979 acceptance speech for the Pritzker Architecture Prize, commented:

The practice of architecture is the most delightful of all pursuits. Also, next to agriculture, it is the most necessary to man. One must eat, one must have shelter. Next to religious worship itself, it is the spiritual handmaiden of our deepest convictions. Even more important than painting and sculpture, it is the primary art of our or any other culture. But today architecture is not often acknowledged as basic to human activity. Industry and science take up our energies... We eschew old-fashioned words like God, soul, aesthetics, glory, monumentality, beauty. We like practical words like cost-effective, businesslike, profitable...Architecture tends in our times to serve these ends. (Johnson)

Johnson’s comments point to the centrality of architecture’s position within lived experience. Further, Johnson points out how the practice of architecture has changed along with our deepest convictions. If architecture is the most necessary of pursuits, next to agriculture, and truly is the handmaiden of our deepest convictions, what are the consequences of a basic human activity that is in service to the ends of capital?

Following Johnson, architecture is fundamental to the defining of an era and a location. The practicality of a city’s architecture affords its prominence in characterizing the values and social conscience of the public for which it was produced. Just as architecture is essential to a society so too is it reflective of one. As Boyer argues, the “demands and pressures of social reality constantly affect the material order of the city” (31). The physical structure of a city constantly evolves, is remade, and adapts to the purposes of society’s needs.

Debord argues that the spectacle provides for society’s needs where religion could not. Debord notes that religion, “justified the cosmic and ontological order that corresponded to the interests of the masters, expounding and embellishing everything societies *could not deliver*” (14). For Debord, this

separate power is spectacular power, but one that is still illusion. The spectacle, Debord argues, is the material reconstruction of religion's illusory power. Further, as Debord explains, "The illusory paradise that represented a total denial of earthly life is no longer projected into the heavens, it is embedded in earthly life itself" (12). This usurping of religion by the spectacle brings the guarantor of authenticity from the imagined to the material, and as a result once again into abstraction.

Debord argues that the spectacle's success in its colonization of all aspects of urban lived experience is due to the alienation of labor. However, he also argues that it was the emergence of new technologies that gave rise to new means of production, and communication that truly powered the spectacle's domination. It seems that the spectacle and modern architecture share a common origin. It is these new technologies that allowed modern architecture to fashion a new aesthetic in the search for a new style.

The modern movement in architecture began as a reaction to the styles of previous eras, namely, that of the nineteenth century. Modern architecture followed Adolf Loos' maxim that ornamentation was a sin. The religious sentiment in Loos' polemic was not without guile. Through the modernist movement, the ostensible effacement of religious or ideological representation from architecture brought with it a new form of meaning and representation geared toward capitalism and the commodity. Although technological advances gave rise to the modern skyscraper (along with more banal architecture geared towards consumption) and its domination of the city's *mise en scene*, its birth from and representation of American capitalistic ethos was still dependent upon human labor. Boyer buttresses this point in arguing that "architecture in the city is not only a spectacle shaped by the representational order of planners and architects; it involves the public as well" (32). What Boyer is pointing to here is that architecture cannot emerge on its own terms. The architectural project must exist within a larger power structure in order for it to have any representational quality and for its realization into the material world. One of the ways in which the architecture of spectacular city is aligned with the spectacle can be seen in the modernist movement as it supplants religious connotations with capitalistic symbolism. This brings any representative quality portrayed through its physicality from the imagined to the material, depicting "what society *could* not deliver" separating "what is *possible* from what is *permitted*" (Debord 14). As architecture serves societal needs, at least the needs of those with enough capital to ensure the realization of the architectural project, the landscape of spectacular city disciplines urban consciousness and desire, providing the material and abstract forms that participate in the construction of an urban ethos centered on production and consumption.

The architecture of the urban environment composes city scenes designed to be looked at for the spectator's amazement, which is evoked by figural images designed for the promotion of consumption. The spectator's

experience of the city's architecture is indivisible from these representational images which function to inform a personal and societal perception of the city through its physical form. Venturi et al, in the germinal work, *Learning from Las Vegas*, demonstrate how architecture is specifically geared toward spectacle and is designed to be audienceed and consumed. Livesay furthers their argument noting the architectural space of Las Vegas has been dominated by "two-dimensional signage systems that directed traffic and unabashedly sold pleasure" relegating architecture to a secondary role in the legibility of urban space (Livesay 6). The physical adornment of architectural space with advertisements constituted the building as billboard. As Debord comments:

These temples of frenetic consumption are subject to the same irresistible centrifugal momentum, which cast them aside as soon as they have engendered enough surrounding development to become overburdened secondary centres in their turn. But the technical organization of consumption is only the most visible aspect of the general process of decomposition that has brought the city to the point of consuming itself. (97)

This aestheticization of everyday life along with its forms of visual communication has been "distilled into one more style propelling the long march of the commodity through culture (Boyer 63). This, according to Boyer, has become the normalized accepted background for contemporary modes of consumption in the city (63). Spectacular city homogenizes space, as it is the center of capital hegemony, it presents itself not as a space for creative engagement but a space for consumption. The materiality of commodified spectacular city banalizes the spectacle as it promises the spatial location for the fulfillment of every desire, keeping individuals separated from the awareness of a different reality and other ways of being. The architectural project is a material practice through which the society of the spectacle molds its own territory and influences the ways in which people render legible the space of the spectacular city.

The Audacity of Parkour

Parkour takes this visual reflection of the ruling economic order and directly challenges it through the corporeal engagement of spectacular city (Debord 10). The spectacle and parkour share similar emergences in that their material manifestations lead to cultivating new guiding habits of thought. For the traceur, parkour is a way of life, a way of understanding the world. As the traceur jumps from building to building, over railings, and across stairs these spectacular corporeal practices further solidify a new way of understanding spectacular space. Parkour, although dependent upon the physical space of spectacular city, molds its own territory constituting different legibilities of spectacular city.

Parkour functions as an explicit antagonist to capital as it simultaneously recognizes the spectacle and negates it by resisting the demand to consume: or by consuming differently. Parkour offers an alternative contribution to spectacular city by consuming architectural space and not engaging in productive consumption. Iain Borden, writing on skateboarding and the commodified city, refers to this as “productive-of-nothing labour” (231). For Borden such activities are disruptive to the optimal maintenance of consumer driven urban space. As one Toronto traceur commented after having performed parkour on a bus stop decorated with an advertisement for a backpack: “the bus stop is considered for its physical properties, and the product is ignored” (qtd. in Thompson 254). In the same vein Borden argues that skateboarders do not:

consume architecture as projected image but as a material ground for action and so gives the human body something to do other than passively stare at advertising surfaces: its motility creates an interest in other things, material forms and in the skater’s own physical presence in the city. (239)

Parkour, like Borden’s skateboarders, takes on a different rationale by rejecting the efficiency and economic logic engendered in spectacularly dominated urban spaces. It appropriates space within the spectacle but also beyond it by differently consuming the material spectacular city and in so doing rejecting its abstract domination.

For Borden skateboarding is part of the dialectic between labor and non-labor (233). Similarly, parkour’s labor produces no products beyond the cat leap; a commodity whose only exchange value is by means of performative action. As the traceur scales buildings and leaps over street signs the corporeal engagement of spectacular city expends energy for something other than commodity consumption. Further, these productive-of-nothing behaviors negate the spectacle through practices that appropriate both urban space and the body. This appropriation is centered on play and creativity or what Lefebvre refers to as “ludo” (177). This type of engagement aligns with Debord’s situationist theories as Parkour’s labor is not the production of commodities but the effort of play.

Debord argues that for us to analyze the spectacle we are obliged to use the spectacle’s own language. Parkour, as a form of *détournement*, operates on the same methodological terrain as it plagiarizes the spectacle, while simultaneously is grounded in its own truth as a present critique. Plagiarism, for Debord, is necessary for progress. It adheres to the author’s phrasing and “exploits his expressions, deletes a false idea, [and] replaces it with the right one” (Debord 113). For parkour to act as a reaction to the spectacle, provide its own critique, and offer new ideas requires a fluency in the language of the spectacle if it is to exploit the author’s expressions.

The discipline of parkour centers on the individual’s path to what he or she perceives as personal freedom. Yet, for parkour to be a true reclamation

of personal freedom traceurs must first be aware of that which fetters them. The traceur's engagement with spectacular city begins with an understanding of the spectacle's spatial and ideological domination. The traceur is aware of normative spatial practices within spectacular city, movement and consumption disciplined by the spectacle, and through parkour seeks to challenge these dominating logics. Through parkour, traceurs plagiarize the spectacle as they hold the knowledge of the author's phrasing: commodity consumption. Parkour, as a material practice and a way of thinking, negates the spectacle's false reality and replaces the geology of lies with its own ideas. As the traceur leaps and runs through the city he or she is at once aware of the spectacle while also rejecting the endless signage system and commodified space. In doing so, parkour's critique of spectacular life exists within its ability to forefront contradictions in illusory spectacular space. As the traceur appropriates commodified space he or she exploits the spectacle's expressions, through the inversion of both the traceur body and the false reality of the spectacle. Spectacular city, seen through the lens of parkour, becomes a space of possibility and creativity with different forms of production and consumption. In this way, the body and the contemplation of real life materially invades the false reality of the spectacle, absorbing spectacular city and aligning itself with it.

Still, parkour, like the spectacle, remains dependent upon material space. In order to challenge the spectacle on its ideological terrain, parkour must engage the spectacle in the material world. In that sense, parkour is linked to the spectacle as it requires the material existence and the abstract representation of spectacular city. The material manifestations of parkour's mode of resistance, in fact, even its guiding philosophy, are subject to the material limits of spectacular space. If Debord is correct that resistance to the spectacle must come from culture, we must view parkour as emerging from spectacular culture. Therefore, parkour's material practices and guiding philosophies are choices of resistance in reaction to but also informed by the spectacle.

Marx, Debord, and other materialist thinkers would argue that there is no return to an authentic existence, one in which our desires and consciousness are free from the domination of social relations. Parkour in itself is not free from social relations as it is a product of such a world. However, parkour negotiates the spectacle-body dialectic through a more dialogic spatial engagement. Parkour centers on the journey to discovering a personal experience of freedom through finding different ways of being in social space. The discourse of this discipline leaves room for all individuals to interpret this on their own terms. Parkour, then, does not promise a return to an authentic existence free from social relations; it provides a way of renegotiating our experience and ways of thinking about these relations within spectacular society.

Returning to the example of my cab ride to the job interview at the king and queen towers, as with the traceur body, bodies within social space are at once political sites. Donning the business suit was meant to communicate

a certain place within the market while simultaneously the culture of the market dictated that the suit was expected if I were to operate therein. This sort of in-place-ness that is disciplined by the “rules” of capital is directly challenged by the traceur. Often times, parkour purposely places traceur bodies in spaces counter to the intended spaces the urban body is meant to occupy. In fact, even the absence of certain bodies produces and reifies hegemonic forces embedded in urban space. My being dressed in the suit was meant to communicate to my interviewers that I belonged there. It was also a message shared by the cab driver. As much as the suit was meant to provide access to certain spaces, the insertion of the traceur body into unintended spaces forefronts the representations and codified conceptions of space. It exposes them as arbitrary, and expands the discourse of how traceur bodies and urban and architectural space are produced and enacted. Within this expanded discourse lies the possibility for the traceur to engage a new form of understanding and communicating his or her existence within urban space.

One of Debord’s greatest concerns was that the spectacle would be treated as another theoretical lens or “formula of sociologico-political rhetoric used to explain and denounce everything *in the abstract*” (111). This, Debord warns, would only serve to reinforce the spectacular system. Debord argues, and rightfully so, that the undoing of the spectacle would not be done by ideas alone. For the spectacle to be effaced from lived experience will take purposeful and practical activity. However, the spectacle may not have as tight a grasp as Debord fears. The very theorization of the spectacle demonstrates that it is not a totalizing force that informs all consciousness, for if it were Debord and others would not be able to think outside of its domination. Parkour provides a way to negate the negation of the spectacle as it realizes spectacular forces while it conditions its own way of understanding the world. However dependent parkour is upon the material existence of spectacular city, it stands as a way of seeing differently in reaction to and beyond the spectacle. Parkour alone may not be able to crumble the rule of the spectacle but it provides valuable perspective into the fissures of the spectacle’s illusory power. This art form answers Debord’s call for the real values of culture to be maintained as parkour negates spectacular culture. Although parkour is a culture present to itself within a larger cultural system, it provides members of this culture a way to point beyond domination. Staying true to Debord, and to poach a term from parkour, this is a valuable cat leap to the negation of the spectacle.

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